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Mexico extradites top capos, others from max security jail

By Katherine Corcoran | AP September 30

MEXICO CITY — Mexico extradited 13 people to the United States on Wednesday, including two top drug lords and several suspects in two high-profile 2011 crimes involving Americans — an attack on immigration agents in San Luis Potosi and the killing of consulate workers in Ciudad Juarez.

The move was part of a new coordination effort between Mexico and the U.S. to fight organized crime, which arose from a June meeting between U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch and her Mexican counterpart, Arely Gomez, a U.S. Justice Department statement said.

The extraditions also come on the heels of the embarrassing July 11 escape by the world's most powerful drug lord, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, from the maximum security prison Altiplano. Mexican officials had said it was impossible for him to escape and he wouldn't be extradited for "300 or 400 years." Many speculated that his blatant flight through a tunnel beneath his cell strained U.S.-Mexico relations.

Mexican officials would not comment on the timing of the extraditions or say whether they had to do with Guzman's escape.

"My guess it is that they're probably starting to make amends for El Chapo," said Mexican security expert Alejandro Hope, adding that 13 at one time is not unprecedented. "Maybe they don't feel as safe now about the security in the prison system."

Among those sent to the U.S. were Edgar Valdez Villarreal, known as "La Barbie," a top lieutenant to the late Arturo Beltran Leyva who later led his own faction of the Beltran Leyva cartel, and Jorge Costilla Sanchez, known as "El Coss," an alleged former leader of the Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas, federal prosecutor Tomas Zeron said.

Zeron said the group included Jose Emanuel Garcia Sota, who is charged in the 2011 killing of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent Jaime Zapata. It also includes three suspects — Luis Umberto Hernandez Celis, Alberto Nunez Payan and Ricardo Valles de la Rosa — charged in the March

2010 murders in Ciudad Juarez of U.S. Consulate employee Leslie Ann Enriquez Catton, her husband Arthur Redelfs and Jorge Alberto Salcido Cenicerros, the husband of a U.S. Consulate employee.

The United States filed an extradition request for Guzman about 2½ weeks before his escape. His lawyer told several media outlets in August that his flight was a direct result of learning that extradition had become imminent.

Valdez and Costilla also were housed at Altiplano and had been in custody at least several years before the extradition requests were honored.

Extraditions had fallen dramatically since 2012, the final year of President Felipe Calderon's term, when Mexico sent 115 people to the U.S., according to a May report from the Congressional Research Service. Last year, the number was 66. None of the five top capos arrested under current President Enrique Pena Nieto has been sent out of Mexico.

Valdez, who was arrested in 2010, faces drug trafficking charges in Texas, Louisiana and Georgia. The U.S.-born, former Texas high school football player and petty street dealer allegedly rose to become one of Mexico's most savage cartel assassins. He was nicknamed "the Barbie" for his fair complexion and green eyes.

Costilla, who was arrested in 2012, was charged in 2002 in the Southern District of Texas with cocaine and marijuana importation and distribution, money laundering, and threatening federal law enforcement officers with assault, kidnapping or murder, according to the Justice Department.

"Today's extraditions would not have been possible without the close collaboration and productive relationship the Department of Justice enjoys with officials at the highest levels of law enforcement in Mexico," Lynch said in the statement.

Associated Press writer E. Eduardo Castillo contributed to this report.

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